



Press Release

The Meteorological Office

PRESS OFFICE

22 December 1998 nr342

WEATHER RADAR INVESTMENT TO IMPROVE FLOOD WARNING

The Met. Office and the Environment Agency are to invest £4.5million over the next three years to improve the weather radar network, which is key to the accuracy of flood forecasting and warning in England and Wales.

The investment, part of the first phase of a ten-year development programme, was sealed today when Peter Ewins, Chief Executive of The Met. Office, and Ed Gallagher, Chief Executive of the Environment Agency, signed a Memorandum of Understanding at the Thames Barrier in London.

The ten-year agreement sets out a programme of improvements to the existing radar network and an ongoing commitment to use new technology to ensure the public is provided with the most effective, service possible.

Environment Agency Chief Executive Ed Gallagher said:

"Recent floods have reinforced the need for very detailed knowledge of heavy rainfall with as much advance warning as possible. Weather radar data is crucial to our flood forecasting and warning capability and this investment is designed to ensure that all the available technology is at hand to provide the most accurate estimates of where floods might occur and when.

Peter Ewins, Chief Executive of The Met. Office, said:

"Improvements to the existing weather radar network will mean a better service in terms of the quality, accuracy, timeliness and reliability of the information we provide to the Environment Agency. We are delighted to extend our close working partnership."

The UK is a world leader in operational weather radar. Over the last 20 years, radar has become an integral part of The Met. Office's national weather observing network. All Environment Agency flood forecasting staff already have 24 hour on-screen access to high resolution rainfall radar information, updated every 15 minutes by The Met. Office. Under the new agreement, the service will benefit from recent R&D and technological advances, resulting in more accurate and better quality data transmitted with greater reliability. These enhancements will allow better short-term forecasting of heavy rainfall, which is essential for improving flood warning on fast-responding rivers.

During the first three years of the agreement, a number of supporting developments will be provided, including:

- establishing a support radar to allow development of new hardware and software for the network without taking any of the existing radars out of continuous operation;
- upgrading radars with new PC-based systems for better data processing and delivery and easier maintenance;
- improving calibration of radar systems for greater accuracy in estimating rainfall;
- providing a standard set of improved weather radar products to each of the Environment Agency's eight Regions; and
- providing a complete quality management system to ensure that the Environment Agency achieves maximum benefit from weather radar data for flood forecasting and warning.

In subsequent years, the need to extend the coverage of the radar network will be assessed in more detail.

Notes

- The Memorandum of Understanding relates to the six weather radar stations in England and Wales which are jointly owned by The Met. Office and the Environment Agency. These are at:
 - Hameldon Hill, Lancs
 - Ingham, Lincs
 - Chenies, Bucks
 - Crug-y-Gorllwyn, Dyfed
 - Cobbacombe Cross, Devon
 - Clee Hill, Salop
- The Environment Agency receives weather radar data from 8 individual radar stations (includes 2 owned by MoD) located in England and Wales, and from the UK and Irish national network comprising 15 radars. The Agency also has access to the European Radar Network via The Met. Office.
- The Thames Barrier, owned and operated by the Environment Agency, was completed in 1984 to provide protection for London against flooding from the tidal Thames. The Barrier has been closed 33 times for flood protection since 1984.

**The Environment Agency
Head Office Press Office
Millbank Tower, 25th Floor
21-24 Millbank
London SW1P 4XL
Tel 0171 863 8710
Fax 0171 863 8655
www.environment-agency.gov.uk**

**The Met. Office
Press Office
London Road
Bracknell
Berkshire RG12 2SZ
Tel 01344 854 629
Fax 01344 854 942
<http://www.met-office.gov.uk/>**



The Met.Office

Excelling in weather services

www.met-office.gov.uk

email: webmanager@meto.gov.uk

© Crown Copyright 1999